

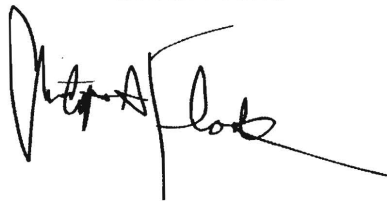
The Making Of: Cheery Point

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

By

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Flook", with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

**Ball State University
Muncie, IN**

July 2013

Expected Date of Graduation

July 2013

I. Abstract

I was waiting for a shuttle at the Lafollette stop on a gray day in early February 2012 when Kenny Stevenson, a good friend and fellow telecommunications student, walked by. "I've been wanting to talk to you," he said, and proceeded to explain he was preparing to shoot a feature length film he wrote and would I like to be a part of this project. I, like so many of his friends and peers, was skeptical. Could I really handle the pressure of shooting a feature on the weekends while working and going to class during the week? Maybe we were all "just being stupid" as Blake Mohler, composer and sound department, so eloquently stated, but Kenny managed to convince me and a handful of others to join him on an incredible journey to *Cheery Point*. What followed was a story as compelling and interesting as the film itself; and one certainly worth sharing. I have condensed this story into a forty-six minute documentary, covering the rapid writing process, casting, production, editing, and the first exclusive screening on November 11, 2012 in Louisville, KY. Producing this documentary challenged all the skills I developed over the last four years as a telecommunications student and required me to learn even more. In the following paper, it is assumed the reader had the opportunity to view the documentary.

II. Acknowledgements

Like all projects of this scale, I couldn't complete this documentary without the help of many people. First and foremost I need to thank Kenny Stevenson,

the creator and fearless leader of *Cheery Point*. He invited me onto this wild ride and trusted me to take control of this story to produce this documentary. He had faith in me, even when progress was slow or problems arose. I could not have completed this documentary without his help, advice, and encouragement.

Every hour of interview would have been useless without my incredible audio team. Thank you to Nathan Isaacs and Bianca Russelburg for giving up weekends and evenings to record the interviews and for your patience when I was struggling. To Bobby Dalley, you saved me more times than I can count throughout this production and I have learned so much from you over the past year. To Blake Mohler, your music was the last touch this documentary needed and the speed at which you stitched it all together astounded me.

I owe a huge debt to the cast and crew of *Cheery Point* for sharing their stories, memories, and all of their behind-the-scenes photos and video. Tommy Martin especially deserves credit here, his Flip camera was constantly recording between takes and he provided more than half of the “BTS” footage.

Finally, a special thanks to Aaron Webster and Chris Flook for your guidance, advice, and patience during this production; and to Jordan Doyle and my parents, David and Wendi Williams, for your constant encouragement.

III. Author's Statement

The featurettes and special features found within DVD releases inform audiences about the filmmaking process, creating millions of wannabe Hollywood

insiders. I, like many others, am drawn to these features, sometimes buying DVDs more for the extra goodies than for the actual feature. Making-of documentaries (MODs) are especially helpful tools for drawing in audiences to share the ins-and-outs of filmmaking and entertaining anecdotes from any given production. While the proliferation of these special features occurred within the last few decades, MODs have a history almost as long as Hollywood. *Making Motion Pictures: A Day in the Vitagraph Studio* (1908) was made in response to public interest in how the technologies worked. Most of the major studios of Old Hollywood utilized short featurettes “to plug upcoming releases, introduce new stars, or show off technological innovations such as color” (Arthur 39). These featurettes slowly faded out with the rise of television. González says the MOD was reintroduced and revolutionized by New Hollywood filmmakers like George Lucas as a need “to document and publish the stories of how and why they made their movies.” These documentaries, like Lucas’s *The Making of Rain People* (1969), focused more on the filmmakers and their attitudes while filming (González 19).

The MOD’s evolution continued with the introduction of the Criterion Collection. According to their website, in 1984 Criterion began offering “important classic and contemporary films.” With these films came a variety of supplements meant to “enable viewers to appreciate Criterion films in context” like story boards, audio commentaries, deleted scenes, and documentaries. Peter Becker, Criterion president, thought of these supplements as “film school in a box,” (qtd.

in González 20) a very appropriate description for the inspiration these documentaries can provide viewers. While interviewing some of my *Cheery Point* colleagues, I discovered many of them had been drawn to filmmaking by MODs. Likewise, the documentaries on the special editions for the *Lord of the Rings* Trilogy were my first in depth look at the filmmaking process and played a role in my own choice of career paths.

As I began creating my own MOD, I thought back to other influential and memorable MODs I have seen over the years and sought out others.* The *Lord of the Rings* MODs stand out for their breadth and detailed examination of the films. *Empire of Dreams: The Story of the Star Wars Trilogy*, found within the *Star Wars Trilogy* DVD set, showed a broader view of the trilogy and highlighted key moments from the *Star Wars* history. I thought of these MODs and others while planning a rough outline and interview questions. The sections dedicated to the techniques of filmmaking – camera work, the innovative uses of green screen and computer technology, and editing – were my original draws to filmmaking; but the moments I remembered most were the stories crew and cast told about being on set. Similarly, when I thought back to my own set experiences on *Cheery Point*, what stood out the most were the interactions I had with the cast and crew in correlation with the stories and inside jokes we tell at reunions. For this reason, I chose to focus the documentary on the journey the cast and crew undertook to complete this film. The story is organized

chronologically, starting with the conception and writing of *Cheery Point*, the production, post production, and ending with the first screening of the film.

With a general outline for my documentary started, I began working in the area of production I am most comfortable with – coordination and planning. On any day of *Cheery Point*'s production there were ten to thirty or more people on set and each with a compelling story to share. I narrowed the number of interviewees down to eighteen people. These eighteen consisted of four members of *Cheery Point*'s advisory board (the leaders on set and those instrumental in planning and running each day), four additional and very dedicated crew members, and ten leading and supporting cast members. I wanted to include as many people as possible, not only because of the many different stories they could tell, but also for the different perspectives they can provide. Bringing all of these people together for *Cheery Point* was one of the biggest challenges we faced while filming; and I was attempting it again.

Thankfully, scheduling the interviews was much easier than planning for *Cheery Point*. All but four of the interviewees were either already on or could easily travel to Ball State's campus. The greatest challenge came in trying to schedule interviews for four of the actors: Tommy Martin, Amy Hunt, Kyle Dal Santo, and Dale Fanella. These four were in Chicago, IL and did not have the means to drive to Muncie for a weekend. Therefore it was necessary for Bobby Dalley, one of the three sound mixers, and I to drive to Chicago. Coordinating the weekend in Chicago was one of the biggest challenges I faced in the

preproduction phase of this documentary. With the advice of Kenny I worked with Jon Meseke, a production assistant and voice over supervisor for *Cheery Point*, to secure studio space at Columbia College. Unfortunately, we discovered just days before the interviews that Columbia did not have space available. The next several hours I reached out to every contact I had – and any contacts they could share – in Chicago for any leads on studio space. More than anything, this experience was a lesson in having a strong professional network. I understand now more than ever how necessary networking is in this industry. Without the suggestions I had from Kenny, Jon, and others I wouldn't have found the studio space at Distract Chicago and likely wouldn't have been able to include those key interviews in the documentary.

Once interviews were scheduled the next step was to decide the equipment I would use. Although the Telecommunications department has a variety of cameras to choose from, I opted to use my own Canon EOS Rebel T3i DSLR. My T3i and other DSLRs like it are becoming more present in the film industry because of their low prices and easy mobility (Koo). I went into this production knowing that I would be competing with other students for equipment and shooting with my own camera ensured that I always had access to the same camera and video was captured using the same settings.

One of the fascinating aspects of this project was hearing how each person remembers the same event differently, or which memories stand out more than others. There were certain topics and stories I wanted interviewees to

discuss – the infamous dogs in the garage story or the many disasters we encountered while filming in Lawrenceburg, KY – but I was curious to hear which stories stood out the most for them. While interviewing I referred back to the advice I received from Dr. Laura O'Hara while working at the Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry. She stressed the importance of starting with “softball questions” or general questions about the subject and letting your interviewee’s responses guide the conversation. The responses to broad questions and requests such as “describe a typical day of filming” were incredibly varied and reflected their different perspectives. While Adam King, who played Zach Regis, remembered shooting a death scene as slow and a “waiting around period,” Adam Bailey, director and writer, spoke more about the happy accidents that occurred while shooting the same scene.

The majority of my time on this documentary was dedicated to editing. Before I could start the process I needed to determine which editing software to use. All of my previous projects were edited using Apple’s Final Cut Pro 7 (FCP), and I originally planned to stay with the program. While still filming the interviews, I was learning Adobe’s After Effects for a class and was drawn to the simplicity of its basic functions and design and how easily it connected to Adobe’s other programs. I also had an opportunity to sit in on a friend’s editing session using Adobe’s video editor Premiere Pro. Right away it was clear the software functioned similarly to FCP. For these reasons I decided to edit the documentary using Adobe’s Premiere Pro. The software is designed and

functions similarly to FCP, making the transition to the software relatively painless; and whenever I encountered problems I could usually find solutions in Lynda.com tutorials.

The editor has tremendous power and responsibility. It is his or her job to bring all the elements of the production together to create a cohesive story. Editors guide the audience through the film by choosing what to show and how to present it. The Russian filmmakers of the 1910s and 1920s were the first to understand the true power of the editing process. Through a series of experiments Lev Kuleshov discovered he could manipulate the audience's reactions by manufacturing spatial relationships between images. For example, a shot of a man's face followed by a bowl of soup implied hunger, but if instead of the soup there was a dead woman in a coffin the scene implied sadness (Bordwell 231, Monaco 449).

Spatial relationships between shots, along with relationships in time, rhythm, and graphics, make up what is known as continuity editing. Typical Hollywood fiction films use continuity editing to tell their stories. Within this system, tremendous work is done on set to maintain continuity in the mise-en-scene – all the elements in front of the camera – and the cinematography. When the editor cuts the film he or she works to “allow space, time, and action to flow over a series of shots,” (Bordwell 236). As a result the cuts usually go unnoticed and feel invisible.

In the case of *Cheery Point*, the editor was attempting to create a world of which the audience had no prior knowledge. Therefore shots were carefully chosen to establish location and time, to connect actions within the scene, and to keep the story moving. For *Cheery Point*'s MOD, this style of editing was not as important. Documentaries are understood to have a firm connection to reality. Because of this, shots are expected to "share relationships in time and space not because of the editing but because of their actual historical linkages" (Nichols 28). Nichols describes documentary editing as evidentiary – cuts are organized to present an argument supported by logic (30). The arguments are presented in a variety of ways; some of the conventions of documentary filmmaking I utilized to present these arguments are interviews and cutting to behind the scenes (BTS) footage and images from the production in order to illustrate points made within the scene.

The editing process was an arduous one; the eighteen interviews resulted in over 25 hours of footage and, in addition, the cast and crew shared more than 600 videos and 300 photos from the production. Sorting through the footage and identifying useful content took days. With all of the information collected, I needed to decide how I would present it. González says MODs rely on "the convention of the interview," and from that the editor can create a story, or if necessary can utilize voice-over narration to flesh out the story even more (22). As I edited, I realized the interviewee's told the stories extremely well, and I wouldn't need a narrator. *Cheery Point*'s production was a very personal story

for those involved, and while they enjoy sharing the story with others, it wouldn't have felt right to have someone else trying to tell it for them.

From the beginning of this process, I didn't want this documentary to simply be a series of talking heads. The repetitive and often long stationary shots lack the dynamic visuals or the emotional appeal that keeps audiences interested. I was very grateful to have such a large selection of BTS footage to choose from. This allowed me considerable freedom to determine which of the stories told by interviewees could make the cut. However, I quickly learned that some of those stories could not be told because we lacked footage to use with them. An example of this is when Assistant Cameraman, Shane Dresch, collapsed from exhaustion. Many people talked about this night in their interviews, and there were some great pieces of dialogue I would have loved to include in the MOD. Unfortunately for the documentary, no cameras were rolling and it was too dark to have recorded any useful footage. Without any footage even remotely relating to this story, I could not find the right emotional impact to make my argument clear.

I knew I would shoot the interviews on a green screen, replacing the green with a graphic design relating to *Cheery Point*. This definitely isn't a new idea for MODs; the interviews for the *Lord of the Rings* MODs were all shot on a green screen. The advantages are certainly numerous – Ball State's studio D provided the privacy and quiet necessary for long, uninterrupted interviews and the green

screen provided a uniformity that could later be manipulated into a more dynamic image than a plain white background.

The graphic designs for these backgrounds came from preexisting promotional materials – a teaser poster of Tommy Martin as Joshua Barrett, the official *Cheery Point* poster, and a promotional image of Louie Lawless as The Mayor. Originally, I planned to only edit the official poster to better fit within the background. Before I finished these edits, I wanted to test replacing the background; I found the teaser poster and used it for the test. I was impressed by how well it fit behind the interviewees, but at the time I still wanted to use only the official poster. As I viewed a final edit of the MOD I became bored with the background; I felt it was too repetitive. Remembering the teaser poster, I tested the introduction again with two backgrounds and the cuts felt more fluid. I immediately found an issue with framing, many of the interviewees had the same framing as the teaser poster. The Mayor promotional image was brought in to remedy the problem. A series of trial and error certainly dominated the editing process.

The Making Of: Cheery Point was the most daunting task I tackled during my college experience. Throughout its production I faced many challenges, some of which I've discussed here and others I would rather keep private. I successfully accomplished parts of the filmmaking process I never attempted before, and for that I will always be proud of the work I did. More than anything, the experience of talking with my friends about our unbelievable trip to *Cheery*

Point, all the hardships we went through, and the pride we share for this project will stay with me forever. I hope that this documentary will not only give audiences an insight into *Cheery Point's* story, but will also serve as closure for the dedicated cast and crew members.

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